9/25/60

THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

FIFTEEN DAYS AGO I WAS A COMPLETE STRANGER TO EVERYONE OF YOU. I HADN'T THE VAGUEST NOTION OF THE TYPE OF PEOPLE IN THE DYER UNION CHURCH, OF THE TYPE OF COMMUNITY DYER ITSELF IS--AND LIKEWISE YOU HADN'T THE VAGUEST NOTION OF THE TYPE OF PERSON I MIGHT BE. TWO SHORT WEEKS AGO YOU MET, AS A CONGREGATION, DECIDED TO ISSUE A CALL TO ME TO FILL YOUR PULPIT--AND I ACCEPTED. IN THOSE BRIEF TWO WEEKS OUR RELATIONSHIP HAS CHANGED--TO SAY THE LEAST, AND MY WHOLE LIFE HAS UNDERGONE DRASTIC RECHANNELING AND TAKEN ON QUITE NEW PERSPECTIVE. I THINK IT APPROPRIATE THEREFORE--AT THE BEGINNING OF MY MINISTRY IN YOUR CHURCH AND COMMUNITY (OR RATHER OUR) TO DEFINE THIS RELATIONSHIP ALONG WITH MY IDEAS CONCERNING THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY--NOT ONLY LOCALLY BUT IN LIGHT OF THE VAST NETWORK WE CALL THE HOLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

A CHRISTIAN MINISTER'S PRIMARY CONCERN IS TO PREACH THE GOSPEL. TO ANNOUNCE THE GOOD NEWS THAT GOD HAS DEMONSTRATED HIS LOVE AND FORGIVENESS AND INDEED REVEALED HIMSELF IN THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST: AND THAT THIS ACT HAS MADE SALVATION A POSSIBILITY, FORGIVENESS AND FREEDOM FROM GUILT AN ALTERNATIVE FOR EVERYONE.

VERBALLY PROCLAIMING AND CONVEYING THIS WONDROUS NEWS HAS BEEN AT THE VERY CORE OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE EVER SINCE OUR LORD HIMSELF PREACHED ALONG THE SHORES OF THE SEA OF GALLILEA AND AMONG THE HILLS OF JUDEA. PAUL SERVED HIS LORD, NOT BY COUNCILING NEUROTICS IN HIS OFFICE, BUT BY SEARCHING OUT ~~EXISTENTIAL~~ LISTENERS, LABOURERS,

MERCHANTS, POOR AND RICH, TO TELL THEM THE GOOD NEWS. CHRISTIAN SAINTS THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES HAVE FOUND VOCAL COMMUNICATION TO BE THE BEST WAY TO DESCRIBE THE WONDROUS EVENT. WITHOUT FAIL TODAY'S LEADING THEOLOGIANS, LEARNED AND SCHOLORLY MEN, REVEAL A UNANIMOUS DESIRE TO SERVE THEIR LORD BY PREACHING, BY CASTING THE FIGURE OF JESUS CHRIST BEFORE MAN--NOT IN A STUDY OF HISTORICAL DOGMA, OR CHURCH HISTORY, BUT FROM A PULPIT.

PREACHING THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST IS AT THE VERY ROOTS OF CHRISTIANITY AND WHEN CONTINUOUS COMMUNICATION CEASES SO WILL CHRISTIANITY.

THE MINISTER'S VERY REASON FOR ASSUMING A PULPIT IS TO COMMUNICATE THIS GOSPEL AND WHEN HIS THINKING AND HIS SERMONS FAIL TO DO THIS, HIS MINISTRY LOSES ALL MEANING WHATSOEVER.

There ARE MANY PROBLEMS CONFRONTING A CHRISTIAN MINISTER IN THE WORLD OF TODAY--SOME VERY SMALL PITFALLS THAT EXISTED 2,000 YEARS AGO AND SOME OTHERS THAT ARE SO LARGE WE ARE QUITE UNCONCIOUS OF THEIR EXISTENCE. AT THE SAME TIME THE TWENTIETH CENTURY OFFERS NEW CHALLENGES TO CHRISTIANITY AND TO THE MINISTER. WITH EVERY NEW ADVANCE IN THE PROBING OF OUTER SPACE, WITH EVERY NEW TURN IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS THE MINISTER MUST MAKE ETERNAL TRUTH MAKE SENSE.

THE LAST DECADE HAS OFFERED A CHALLENGE OR PERHAPS A WARNING TO CHRISTIANITY THAT HAS NOT BEEN FELT FOR 1,500 YEARS. CHRISTIANS OF THE FIRST FEW CENTURIES LIVED UNDER THE CONSTANT BELIEF THAT THE END OF THE WORLD WAS ON THE VERGE OF OCCURING. THIS BELIEF WE CALL IT APOCALYPTICISM, COLORED THE TEACHINGS OF THE APOSTLES, THE AUTHORS OF ALL THE NEW TESTAMENT--AND EVEN THE TEACHINGSOF JESUS HIMSELF. UNDERLYING ALL THAT THEY SAID AND WROTE WAS THIS COMBINATION OF HOPE AND FEAR REGARDING IMMEDIATE END OF THE AGE. WHAT THEY HAD TO SAY WAS URGENT--THEY WERE WORKING AGAINST A DEADLINE.

NOW I TAKE NO STOCK IN STATEMENTS THAT AT SUCH AND SUCH AN HOUR ON SUCH AND SUCH A DAY THE WORLD WILL END AND JESUS WILL RETURN IN ALL HIS GLORY--BUT I DO THINK WE CAN TAKE SERIOUSLY THE NEW TESTAMENT EXHORTATION--"BRETHREN, THE TIME IS SHORT." THE DEVELOPMENTS OF THE LAST TEN YEARS,--EVEN THE RECENT DAILY CHANGES WE OBSERVE IN THE UNITED NATIONS ALL MAKE FIRST CENTURY APOCALYPTICISM, AGAIN HAVE MEANING. COMPLETE ANNHILATION IS A NASTY SUBJECT, ONE WE DON'T TOUCH OVER A FASHIONABLE TABLE, OR ON A PLEASANT SABBATH MORNING, BUT NEVERTHELESS THE IRONY IS STILL THERE--AFTER TWENTY CENTURIES CHRISTIAN PREACHERS ARE FACED WITH THE SAME URGENCY,--WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF SOMEWHAT THE SAME DEADLINE.

PERHAPS THE GREATEST CHALLENGE FACING THE 20th CENTURY CHRISTIAN MINISTER IS THAT CREATED BY MASS COMMUNICATION. SOCIOLOGISTS HAVEN'T BEGUN TO TRY TO MEASURE THE PRESENT AND FUTURE EFFECTS OF THE CONSTANT BOMBARDMENT THE HUMAN MIND ENCOUNTERS THROUGH RADIO, TELEVISION, NEWSPAPERS, MAGAZINES, MOVIES AND PAPERBACKS--FROM ARISTOTLE TO MICKEY SPILLANE. IT IS READILY SEEN THAT ALL THESE AGENCIES OF COMMUNICATION ARE RELATIVELY NEW, AND THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT THAT IT WILL AND IS GREATLY AFFECTING THE PUBLIC MIND,--AND PUBLIC THINKING--FOR GOOD OR FOR BAD IS NOT FOR ME TO SAY. ONLY IGNORANCE CLAIMS THAT EVERY MOTION PICTURE IS ROTTEN, THAT ANY PUBLICATION WITH A PAPER INSTEAD OF CLOTH BACK CAN BE CAST AWAY AS FILTH. THE FLOW OF NEWS WHICH IS NOW AVAILABLE CONTRIBUTES TO THE FUNCTIONING OF OUR PARTICULAR SOCIETY: THE OPPORTUNITY FOR RECREATION, ENTERTAINMENT AND INTELLECTUAL IMPROVEMENT ARE INDEED COMMENDABLE.

YET WE WOULD BE EQUALLY IGNORANT IF WE DID NOT RECOGNIZE THE OBSTACLES FOR CONVEYING CHRISTIANITY WHICH THE PREVELANCE OF MASS COMMUNICATION RAISES. IN ALL AGENCIES OF MASS COMMUNICATION THERE IS A TENDENCY TOWARD UNIFORMITY-TOWARDS A STEREOTYPE PUBLIC MIND. BOOKS ARE PUBLISHED THAT WILL SELL TO ALL THE PUBLIC, INDIVIDUALS MINDS ARE LUMPED TOGETHER IN ONE PILE OF POTENTIAL CASH.

THE GREATEST DRAWBACK TO MASS COMMUNICATION--AND IN THE LONG RUN ITS MOST

DETERRENT CHARACTERISTIC, AS IT IS ENCOUNTERED BY CHRISTIANITY, IS THE VERY OBVIOUS INFERIOR QUALITY OF MUCH THAT IS SEEN AND READ BY THE GREATEST NUMBERS. IF A BOOK LIKE PEYTON PLACE SELLS MILLIONS OF COPIES, IF A HOLLYWOOD PRODUCES AND PROCLAIMS AS GREAT A MOVIE LIKE PSYCHO--A FREUDIAN HODGE PODGE THAT ERASES THE LINE BETWEEN LOVE AND HATE, LUST AND DESTRUCTION--WE MUST STEP BACK A MINUTE AND QUESTION THE ENTIRE SYSTEM. WE CANNOT DENY THAT A SHAPING INFLUENCE ON MILLIONS IS THAT OF MOVIE AND TELEVISION PRODUCERS AIMING AT THE BLOOD PRESSURE OF A TWELVE YEAR OLD. WHO KNOWS THE RESULTS OF THIS PHENOMENON--FRED ALLEN HAS PROPHESIED THAT THE NEXT GENERATION WILL HAVE EYES AS BIG AS CANTALOUPES AND BRAINS THE SIZE OF A SPLIT PEA. ONE THING IS CERTAIN--REGARDLESS OF THE OUTCOME OF THIS GIGANTIC FORCE CHRISTIAN MINISTERS MUST SPEAK IN CLEAR, CONCISE TERMS, MUST EXPLAIN AND PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL, CONSTANTLY PROMPTING AND PERSUADING THE HUMAN MIND TO KEEP FUNCTIONING, TO KEEP SEEKING FOR MEANING--TO NEVER RETREAT FROM MENTALLY WRESTLING WITH THE ISSUES OUR RELIGION RAISES TO THE COMFORT AND SECURITY OF THE T.V. SCREEN.

THE PITFALLS THAT LIE IN THE PATH OF THE CONTEMPORARY MINISTER ARE MANY AND VARIED--I HAVE TRIED TO NARROW DOWN THE FIELD TO TWO, HOPING THEY WILL INCLUDE ENOUGH TERRITORY TO DEMONSTRATE MY POINT. THEY ARE THE EVER PRESENT AND OPPOSITE TENDENCIES TO <u>OVERSIMPLIFY</u> THE GOSPEL AND OVER COMPLICTE IT BY DISGUISING IDEAS

IN AN INCOMPREHENDABLE VOCABULARY.

THOMAS JEFFERSON FOUND CHRISTIANITY A BIT EASIER TO SWALLOW AFTER HE REWORTE THE NEW TESTAMENT, LEAVING OUT ALL THE MIRACLES, HEALINGS, THE BIRTH AND RESURRECTION MARRATIVES--OMITTING ANY MENTION OF THE MYSTERIOUS--THE SUPER NATURAL. RECENTLY SOME DISILLUSIONED SOUL COINED THE PHRASE "THE SIMPLE GOSPEL" AND SINCE THAT TIME CERTAIN MINISTERS AND THEIR CONGREGATIONS FIND GREAT COMFORT IN RELYING ON A FEW SIMPLE FORMULAS FOR ANSWERS TO EVERY SITUATION. "JESUS SAVES" DOESN'T QUITE ANSWER A GUILT RIDDEN HUMANITY OR A MEMBER OF A TEENAGE GANG DESPERATELY LOOKING FOR MEANING IN HIS DISMAL LIFE. "TAKE IT TO THE LORD IN PRAYER" DOESN'T SATISFY A CHRISTIAN NEGRO WHO HAS BEEN THE VICTIM OF LIFE, LIBERTY AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS--LOUISIANIA STYLE. THE NEWS WE HAVE TO PROCLAIM IS JUST NOT THAT SIMPLE. PEOPLE WHO WOULD DO AWAY WITH ALL THEOLOGY, WHO WOULD BURN ALL UNIVERSITIES WITH A RESPECTABLE BIOLOGY DEPARTMENT, WHO WOULD RID CHRISTIANITY OF SEMINARY FACULTIES THAT BELIEVE A MINISTER MUST BE AN E EDUCATED MAN--WOULD STRIP CHRISTIANITY OF ALL ITS MYSTERY. ST. PAUL DID NOT SAY [illegible] "BEHOLD AS I EXPLAIN A MYSTERY IN WORDS OF ONE SYLLABLE"--HE SAID " BEHOLD I SHOW YOU A MYSTERY." A SIMPLIFIED GOSPEL HAS NO ROOM FOR THE BEAUTIFULLY DEEP CONCEPT OF REDEMPTION, JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH, OR THE

INCARNATION. THERE IS NO COMMON DENOMINATOR WITH WHICH WE CAN REDUCE CHRISTIANITY. IT MUST BE OBSERVED AS A SET OF IDEAS, HUMAN IDEAS, THAT POINT TO THAT OF WHICH WE CAN NEVER HOPE TO KNOW AND FULLY UNDERSTAND. GOD IS GOD AND MAN IS MAN--AND THERE IS NO SIMPLE GOSPEL.

ON THE OTHER HAND, THE MINISTER AND ESPECIALLY THOSE FRESH FROM SEMINARY ~~XXX~~ OR STILL ATTENDING, LIKE MYSELF, SOMETIMES TEND TO USE THEIR PROFESSIONAL JARGON, THE TALK OF THEIR TRADE. YOU ALL HAVE HAD THE EXPERIENCE OF TALKING WITH A DOCTOR OR NURSE, AND AFTER HEARING THEIR DIAGNOSIS OF YOUR SYMPTOMS FINDING YOURSELF COMPLETELY OBLIVIOUS AS TO THE NATURE OF YOUR AILMENT. THE ANALOGY IS POOR--BUT THE SAME THINGS SO EASILY OCCURS IN THE PULPIT. A SERMON WHICH BECOMES SO INVOLVED IN TERMINOLOGY AND DEFINITION IS NOT ONLY USELESS BUT AN OUTRIGHT BORE. I FOUND A PASSAGE FROM A SERMON OF A FAMOUS THEOLOGIAN--IT READS AS FOLLOWS: "SPIRIT IS THE UNION OF BEING AND NONBEING. THOUGH REALITY IS BASICALLY BEING, WHILE THERE IS NEVERTHELESS PASSAGE BACK AND FORTH FROM BEING INTO NONBEING, AS THE PERISHING OF CANCELLED TIME (FROM BEING TO NONBEING) AND THE REAL CREATION OUT OF NOTHING BY THE BECOMING OF THE GENUINELY NEW (FROM NONBEING TO BEING) THERE MUST BE A RELATION BETWEEN THE TWO REALMS OF BEING AND NONBEING WHICH CANNOT BE DEFINED IN TERMS OF EITHER REALM WITHOUT DOING VIOLENCE TO ITS OWN KIND OF INFINITY. THAT RELATION, UNITING WITHIN ITSELF THE TWO INCOMMENSURATE AND NONCONTRADICTORY, INFINITIES--IS SPIRIT."

IT IS OUT OF ITS CONTEXT AND THUSLY SOUNDS WORSE THAN IT IS--BUT IS DEMONSTRATES MY POINT. THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL CAN BECOME LOST IN THE FOREST OF PHILOSOPHICAL TERMINOLOGY.

THE CHRISTIAN MINISTER IS FACED WITH THE CHALLENGE TO STRIKE A VERY DIFFICULT MEDIUM. HE MUST RAISE HIS CONGREGATIONS THINKING FROM THE "SIMPLE GOSPEL" STAGE BUT AT THE SAME TIME REFRAIN FROM GOING TOO FAR AND CONFUSING INSTEAD OF GUIDING.

VERY QUICKLY I WANT TO BRING THIS DISCUSSION DOWN TO THE LOCAL SCALE AND TALK ABOUT A CONCRETE SITUATION--MY ROLE AS PASTOR OF THIS CHURCH.

I HAVE THE MISFORTUNE OF FOLLOWING IN YOUR PULPIT, A VERY OUUSTANDING MAN. IN NO CONCEIVABLE WAY CAN I HOPE TO COMPARE WITH HIS YEARS OF EXPERIENCE, STUDY AND PREACHING. TRULY A FINE LEADER, ANY CHURCH WOULD BE FORTUNATE TO HAVE HIM IN ITS PULPIT. I CAN HOWEVER OFFER ALL THAT I HAVE, IN HOPES THAT AS I LEARN WE WILL MUTUALLY BENEFIT AND BECOME BETTER SERVANTS OF OUR LORD.

I HAVE THE STRONG CONVICTION THAT ANY MAN WHO EXPECTS TO PREACH THE WORD OF GOD" 52 SUNDAYS A YEAR IS A BIT NAIVE. IN ATTEMPTING TO DO SUCH WE MUST CONTEND WITH SUCH DETERRING FACTORS AS HUMAN ECCENTRICITIES, SELF-CENTERDNESS, PRIDE, PERSONAL FAULTS AND FAILINGS, PERSONAL PREFERENCES AND BELIEFS. A MINISTER CAN HOPE

AND PRAY THAT HE WILL BE THE TOOL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT BUT IT IS DOUBTFUL WHETHER THIS IS THE CASE IN EVERY SENTENCE OF EVERY SERMON. WITH THIS IN MIND THE MINISTER MUST ALSO BE A TEACHER. THIS ME CAN DO EVERY SUNDAY AND AS YOU CAN TELL THIS I WILL TRY TO DO.

IN ACCEPTING YOUR CALL I DON'T MEAN TO BE YOUR PASTOR FROM 9:30 to 12:00 ON SUNDAYS. THIS I COULD DO AND LIVE IN CHICAGO. LIVING AMONG YOU AND TAKING MY PLACE IN THE COMMUNITY I HAVE AUTOMATICALLY BECOME YOUR SPIRITUAL REPRESENTATIVE AND THIS ROLE WILL GEAR ALL THAT ID DO AND SAY. I TRULY HOPE THAT YOU WILL NOT ALLOW ME TO BECOME A SUNDAY MORNING MINISTER ONLY BUT WILL CALL ON ME AT ANYTIME, FOR ANY PURPOSE AND I WILL DO ALL THAT I CAN TO HELP.

HAVING BRIEFLY DESCRIBED MY THOUGHTS ON THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY AND SPECIFICALLY OUR LOCAL SITUATION IW WOULD LIKE TO CLOSE BY DELVING INTO MY DEEPEST THOUGHTS ABOUT THE MINISTRY, ONES THAT CONCERN THE VERY REASON FOR CHRISTIANITY, THE CHURCH AND ITS MINISTERS. — the "why" behind the and the appearance of Jesus C

AS I STATED IN MY FIRST SERMON TO YOU, OUR PRIMARY CONCERN, THE ONE THAT LIES
~~HS~~ ABOVE AND BELOW ALL OTHERS, IS TO WORSHIP AND PRAISE THE ONE LORD GOD ALMIGHTY. JESUS' LIFE AND TEACHINGS MAKE SENSE ONLY BECAUSE HE WAS THE INCARNATION OF GOD, HIS REVELATION IN HUMAN FELSH. FOLLOWING IN THE SAME LINE OF THOUGHT THE VERY REASON FOR JESUS'

EXISTENCE, AND OF THE RESULTANT GOSPEL IS THAT WE MAY BETTER KNOW AND LOVE OUR CREATOR. AGAIN SUDDENLY RETURNING TO THE LOCAL LEVEL---OUR PRIME CONCERN IN GATHERING HERE ON SUNDAY MORNINGS IS TO WORSHIP AND TO WEEKLY DEDICATE OUR LIVES TO THE LORD. THIS MAY SOUND LIKE A ROUTINE MATTER BUT IF YOU THINK A MINUTE IT BECOMES CLEAR THAT THIS IS SELDOM THE CASE. THE POPULAR CONCEPTION OF A SUNDAY MORNING SERVICE IS VERY MUCH LIKE A TRIP TO THE THEATRE. THE CONGREGATION IS THERE—TO BE ENTERTAINED, THE MINISTER WITH FLOWING PHRASES AND CATCHY WITCISMS IS THE ACTOR, AND GOD IS THE PROMPTER, PERIODICALLY GIVING A FEW CLUES TO THE PREACHER SO THAT HE MAY BETTER INSPIRE OR ENTERTAIN HIS LISTENERS WHATEVER THE CASE MAY BE. YOU WILL REALIZE HOW TRUE THIS ANALOGY IS IF YOU WILL CONSIDER HOW MANY TIMES YOU HAVE HEARD A MINISTER CRITICISED FOR HIS SERMON--"HE WAS POOR THIS MORNING"—OR"BOY, DID HE PUT ME TO SLEEP." I DON'T THINK I'M EXAGGERATING ONE IOTA WHEN I SAY THAT THE MAJORITY OF CHURCH GOERS ARE THERE TO BE ENTERTAINED IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER--AND WITH THIS ATTITUDE OR CONDITION MY BELIEFS AND SERMONS WILL CLASH HEAD ON. USING THE SAME ANALOGY OF THE THEATRE WE MUST SEE THE MINISTER ONLY AS A PROMPTER, PROMPTING THE CONGREGATION, WHO ARE THE ACTORS, IN THEIR ROLE AS WORSHIPPERS. GOD OF COURSE IS THE AUDIENCE WHO, IF YOU WILL EXCUSE A LITTLE EARTHINESS, IS THE ONLY PARTY INVOLVED/ ENTITLED TO AN OPINION CONCERNING THE WHOLE DRAMA. IN THIS PICTURE THE MINISTER AND

AND THE SERMON ARE IMPORTANT—BUT OF GREATEST IMPORTANCE IS THE ROLE OF THE ACTORS — YOU-AS YOU WORSHIP YOUR GOD. WITH THIS CONSTANTLY IN MIND I XXXXXXXX ASSUME YOUR PULPIT,. I WILL NOT TRY TO BE ENTERTAINING OR AMUSING BUT WILL TRY TO PROMPT YOU TOWARDS A BETTER PERFORMANCE, A FULLER, RICHER EXPERIENCE OF WORSHIP.

WE GATHER AS A GROUP, A CONGREGATION AND WE WORSHIP, PRAISE AND CONFESS TOGETHER--BUT IN THE LAST ANALYSIS WHEN WE ENGAGE IN WORSHIP OUR LORD ENCOUNTERS US FACE TO FACE--INDIVIDUALLY-AND TO THIS END I WILL AIM ALL MY ACTIVITIES AS YOUR MINISTER, STRIVING TO MAKE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR LORD MEANINGFUL AND REAL, HOPING YOU WILL LEAVE HERE SUNDAY MORNINGS, NOT WITH THE PLEASANT SENSATION OF BEING ENTERTAINED OR THE SECURE FEELING OF BEING LULLED TO SLEEP BY SWEET SOUNDING PHRASES BUT WITH YOUR HEARTS AND MINDS OVERFLOWING FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF ENCOUNTERING, IN AN ACT OF WORSHIP, OUR LORD AND CREATOR-THROUGH JESUS CHRIST. AMEN.